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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [AF](#) [IT](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ AND NONPROLIFERATION ON  
BUSH-BERLUSCONI AGENDA

REF: A. ROME 1756

[1](#)B. STATE 96082

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION EMIL SKODON  
FOR REASONS 1.5(B)(D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Italy is likely to establish a Forward Support Base (FSB) and contribute to the existing US-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Herat as requested by the US (refTel B), according to Prime Minister Berlusconi's Diplomatic Advisor Giovanni Castellaneta. In a May 12 meeting, Castellaneta told the DCM the Prime Minister is inclined to approve the request but is carefully considering the timing of such an announcement on the current delicate domestic political balance and the situation in Iraq. Castellaneta's personal view is that the Prime Minister will give the green light for the FSB and PRT but will need to delay a formal announcement until the June 28-29 NATO Summit in Istanbul. He said the issue will be on Berlusconi's agenda for his upcoming meetings with President Bush. Castellaneta and the DCM also discussed Iraq and the GME. End Summary.

#### AFGHANISTAN CONTRIBUTIONS

[1](#)2. (C) In a May 12 meeting with the DCM (accompanied by PolMil Officer) on a range of issues, Amb. Castellaneta indicated that PM Berlusconi would likely decide to support an Italian FSB and PRT in Herat. A decision is expected very soon and Castellaneta said Berlusconi would be ready to discuss the issue during his May 19 meeting with President Bush. Italy might need to delay a formal announcement until the June 28-29 Istanbul Summit, Castellaneta added, for two reasons. On the internal political front, recent events in Iraq have increased the pressure on the government; an announcement now to launch a new mission in Afghanistan might fuel further criticism, he explained. Operationally, Italian military forces are stretched thin covering Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and other missions worldwide. Italy wants the flexibility to be able to send short-term reinforcements in the near future if that becomes necessary. Our priority is Iraq, Castellaneta said. If the Iraq transition process goes well, Italy will be able to stand up the FSB and contribute the PRT in Herat, he said.

[1](#)3. (C) Castellaneta noted that a recent Italian mission to Herat had returned on May 11 with very positive reports. Italian officials had met with Iranian representatives, who were supportive of an Italian presence in the area. Castellaneta said he has also discussed the operation with Chief of Defense Adm. Di Paola, who expects to send an initial team of 20-40 Italians to Herat. By the end of 2004, that team will expand to 100 persons, increasing to 300-400 by 2005.

#### IRAQ

[1](#)4. (C) The DCM asked Castellaneta's views of Iraq transition and beyond, including eventual NATO involvement. Castellaneta agreed that June 30 is an important opportunity to move from Coalition to international community participation in stabilizing and developing Iraq. Based on recent meetings with Arab leaders, Castellaneta agreed that enlarging the Coalition and transferring power to the Iraqis smoothly but quickly is important. Tunisian President Ben Ali had told Berlusconi on May 11 that he plans to build support for an Arab peacekeeping presence to balance the US/European presence in Iraq at the May 21-22 Arab League Summit in Tunis. While Castellaneta thought this might be ambitious, he said he had stressed to Ben Ali the importance of Arab League unity of support.

[1](#)5. (C) Castellaneta confirmed that Italy has always supported a NATO role in Iraq, building on its initial presence in support of the Polish division. A request for an international force such as NATO made by delegates to an Iraqi national conference would make it easier to get full support for a NATO mission, he said. That would put any NATO decision far into the second half of 2004, given current thinking about when the national conference would be held. France and Germany might not contribute forces but they would likely give tacit support by not actively opposing the idea.

GME

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16. (C) Castellaneta was positive about the latest GME draft for the G8 Summit. He believed it would be possible to go forward with the GME at Sea Island.

NONPROLIFERATION

17. (C) Castellaneta said Berlusconi might also raise nonproliferation issues with President Bush. During meetings last week in Rome, the Chinese Prime Minister told the PM that he was very concerned about North Korea's activities and the stalled talks. In addition, Berlusconi might discuss Libya's efforts to cooperate on nonproliferation matters, he said. DCM noted that Castellaneta's May 17 meeting with U/S Bolton will be another opportunity to review nonproliferation matters.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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